

VZCZCXRO4042
PP RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHCHI #0077 1600938
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 090938Z JUN 09
FM AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1063
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1145

UNCLAS CHIANG MAI 000077

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV PHUM SCUL SOCI TH](#)

SUBJECT: FIVE RELIGIONS, ONE VOICE: CHIANG MAI INTER-FAITH GROUP
PROMOTES RECONCILIATION

Summary and Comment

Of the 35 or so inter-faith groups that exist across Thailand, Chiang Mai's Inter-faith Solidarity Committee claims to be the only one with representatives from each of the five religions officially recognized in the country's Constitution: Buddhist, Muslim, Brahmin-Hindu, Sikh, and Christian. This non-official committee, founded in 2008, meets monthly to promote long-term community reconciliation and inter-faith understanding. It has spoken publicly against "red-yellow" violence and has conducted small-scale outreach to Muslim communities in Thailand's deep South.

12. Comment: It is encouraging that local leaders of these five religions have committed to working collaboratively and to speaking out in support of peace and reconciliation between conflicting political and religious groups. Chiang Mai's Inter-faith Solidarity Committee could serve as a good model for elsewhere in Thailand. We will continue to seek opportunities to engage with it. End Summary and Comment.

Peace, Love, and Politics

13. Consul General and staff met June 5 with the leadership of the Chiang Mai Inter-faith Solidarity Committee. This non-official group, founded in 2008, claims to be the only one of 35 or so inter-faith groups across Thailand with representatives from each of the five religions recognized in the country's Constitution: Buddhist, Muslim, Brahmin-Hindu, Sikh, and Christian. The Committee meets monthly to promote long-term community reconciliation and inter-faith understanding. Its activities are funded solely by contributions from each faith group. Although the Committee is committed to maintaining its non-partisan stance, it does serve an advisory role with provincial authorities. Indeed, one of the Committee's goals is to ensure that government officials understand the beliefs and historical context of each major religion.

14. CG met with the group after hearing about it from the Chiang Mai provincial Governor, who praised the Committee as a

useful mechanism for promoting long-term community reconciliation. In recent months, the Committee has spoken out publicly against "red-yellow" violence and conflict. During the mid-April "Songkran" politically-motivated riots, it submitted a media statement calling for reconciliation, and Committee members conducted television and radio interviews. The Committee firmly believes that religion can serve as a source of stability and a means of promoting national unity in times of political and social conflict. The group makes a special effort to reach out to youth, encouraging young people to use their religious beliefs as a moral compass.

15. The Committee has conducted small-scale outreach to communities in Thailand's deep South in an attempt to assuage distrust and suspicion between ethnic Thai Buddhist and ethnic Malay Muslim communities. By hosting religious leaders from the southernmost provinces, Chiang Mai's Inter-faith Solidarity Committee seeks to promote religious understanding and discredit "false doctrines" that lead to violence and religious extremism. As such, the Committee's activities emphasize the beliefs shared by all religions, including a desire for peace and the promotion of ethical behavior.

16. The Committee, currently chaired by its Muslim representative, praised post for bringing in Muslim speakers from the U.S. in recent years, and noted that similar programs would be well-received in the future.

MORROW